HPV Vaccine

In every pregnancy, a woman starts out with a 3-5% chance of having a baby with a birth defect. This is called her background risk. This sheet talks about whether exposure to the HPV vaccine may increase the risk for birth defects over that background risk. This information should not take the place of medical care and advice from your health care provider.

What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common infection that is transmitted by skin to skin sexual contact. HPV is not just one virus. There are over 200 different kinds of HPV. It is thought that at least half of all people who are sexually active have been exposed to at least one type of HPV. Most people will have no symptoms of HPV infection and no related health problems. However, some types of the virus can cause genital warts in men and women. Other types of HPV can cause cervical cancer in women or other cancers in both men and women.

If I have HPV, will that cause pregnancy problems?

Even though HPV is common, it is not well studied during pregnancy. HPV is not considered a medical reason to avoid pregnancy.

HPV has not been linked to causing birth defects. Studies have suggested that HPV may contribute to some cases of miscarriage, high blood pressure in pregnancy and possibly premature delivery. However, other studies have not noticed an increased chance of high blood pressure or premature delivery. Therefore, it is not clear that HPV would increase risk to pregnancy.

HPV can be passed to a newborn during pregnancy or through the birth canal. Usually this causes no problems for the newborn. In rare cases, a baby can develop warts in his throat that can cause breathing problems. This is a serious condition called juvenile onset recurrent respiratory papillomatosis (JORRP).

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine provides protection against some types of HPV. There are several different vaccines available. They currently protect against 4 to 9 of the HPV virus types. These vaccines do not contain a live virus. This means they are noninfectious and cannot give a person HPV. The vaccines are given as an injection in a series of three doses at three different times. They are licensed for males and females between the ages of 9 and 26 years of age. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that the three doses be given between the ages 11-12 because the vaccine provides the most protection when given prior to any HPV exposure.

I just got the HPV vaccine; how long should I wait until I get pregnant?

Since the HPV vaccine is noninfectious, there is no specific recommended waiting period before attempting to get pregnant.

I am pregnant. Should I get the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women because it is most effective prior to sexual contact and not well studied in pregnancy.

I didn’t know I was pregnant when I got the HPV vaccine. Could this harm my baby?

Noninfectious vaccines are considered to be a low risk during pregnancy. Additionally, studies in pregnant animals with the HPV vaccine found no increase in birth defects. Studies are ongoing with human exposures to the
vaccine during pregnancy.

The manufacturer of Cervarix® reported higher rates of miscarriage in women receiving the vaccine close to the start of their pregnancy. However, the rate of miscarriage was still within the rate of miscarriages expected for the general population (women who had not received the vaccine). However, other reports on clinical trials did not notice an increased chance for miscarriage in women who became pregnant shortly after or during vaccination. It has been suggested to wait until after pregnancy to complete any remaining shots in the series.

**Can I receive the HPV vaccine while breastfeeding?**

Yes. Noninfectious vaccines like the HPV vaccine are compatible with breastfeeding. Be sure to talk to your health care provider about all your choices for breastfeeding.

**The father of the baby received the HPV vaccine around the time that I got pregnant. Is there a risk to the baby?**

No. There is no evidence that vaccines given to men will affect the sperm. In general, exposures that fathers have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures and Pregnancy at [https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/](https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/).

References Available Upon Request